



February 19, 2013

*Appropriations Committee – Budget hearing re: Permanent Commission on the Status of Women*

My name is Alice Pritchard, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF). CWEALF is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to empowering women, girls and their families to achieve equal opportunities in their personal and professional lives. For almost 40 years, CWEALF has worked alongside the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) to engage women, educate the community and illustrate the issues affecting the women living in Connecticut.

PCSW plays a crucial role in the state to ensure women's voices are heard. Therefore, I am here today to urge your support for the PCSW and to oppose consolidating it into one commission, essentially eliminating the agency.

Since its establishment in 1973, PCSW has served as a critical channel in bringing the voices of women to State government by providing information, research and analysis to elected officials and the general public about all matters concerning the status of Connecticut women.

Because of their position, PCSW has the ability to monitor state policy on a broad range of issues including the health, safety, economic needs, and education of women and their families. This past year, in cooperation with Wider Opportunities for Women, PCSW released Connecticut's Basic Economic Security Tables; a resource designed to give legislators a more complete picture of the basic needs that must be met to achieve true economic security for Connecticut workers and families. Given the current economic climate of our state, accurate and timely economic security information is essential so that the state can more appropriately plan and develop strategies to address economic issues and how they uniquely affect women, especially those who are the sole providers for their families.

But their work is not only focused on women's economic position. Equally important is the work PCSW does related to the quality of services available to women and girls. They collaborated on the successful establishment of a statewide response to the reporting of sexual assaults on university campuses, continue to facilitate efforts to improve Family Medical Leave benefits, and consistently work to educate groups and individuals on gender discrimination. Additionally they represent the needs of women on numerous commissions, coalitions, and committees. All of these activities are vital to strengthening Connecticut's women and their families. PCSW is a valuable partner and resource making all of Connecticut's programs and services for women, girls and their families stronger because of their ability to engage others and provide quality information.

Legislators have difficult choices to make over the coming months on how to best balance the state budget. The PCSW currently accounts for far less than 1% of the State's spending with an annual budget of approximately \$500,000. Eliminating the PCSW as an independent commission by combining it with other commissions concerned with the needs of different populations is a dangerous step. The voices of women and their families would then have to compete to have their concerns heard over numerous equally valuable issues. By melding PCSW with other commissions, the State risks undermining their ability to protect the unique needs of women in Connecticut and jeopardizes the hard won progress that has been made thus far. Thank you.